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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000489

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PINS](#) [MARR](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: GUINEA'S MILITARY ENGAGED IN NATIONWIDE PROTEST

Classified By: Political Officer Jessica Davis Ba. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) On May 2-3, military officers and soldiers on bases and military barracks throughout Guinea protested over wages and the corruption of senior military officers. There are reports that junior-level officers raided weapons and food stores in several military outposts and looted the house of General Kerfalla Camara, Chairman of Defense Staff. There are unconfirmed reports of injuries to 18-25 military personnel and family members in Kindia and 8 military personnel in Labe, most of whom have been hit by stray bullets. Thus far, the majority of the protests have been confined to military bases. Through an anonymous letter dubbed the "red bulletin", soldiers are demanding nine years of salary arrears totaling approximately 300 billion GNF (approximately 97 million USD) and are accusing senior military leaders of embezzling the majority of these funds. These protests are considered by military and civilians alike to be a military-military issue that must be resolved within military channels. On May 5, Guinea's government will hold an special cabinet meeting and the National Council of Security and Defense will also meet to determine a solution. Many expect that senior military officials will be removed from their positions as part of a negotiated agreement to appease the soldiers. End Summary.

Shots Fired Result in Several Injuries

¶2. (C) Throughout the night of May 2, junior-level military officers and soldiers on bases in Conakry, Kindia, and Labe fired shots into the air in protest over salaries and the corruption of senior military officers. The night of May 3, military officers on bases in Kankan and N'Zerekore, and in the military barracks in the cities of Macenta, Gueckedou, Kissidougou, and Faranah joined the protest. We have received reports from all of these cities that soldiers fired shots into the air beginning at approximately 2100 hours and ending at approximately 0300 the next morning. There are reports from Conakry and Kankan that shots continue to be fired this morning, May 4. The majority of these protests are confined to military bases and barracks. However, embassy staff confirmed hearing shots fired into the air in residential neighborhoods in the Conakry suburbs.

¶3. (C) We confirmed with a senior advisor to the Chief of the Army Health Service that, as of May 3 evening, there were at least 18 people injured in Kindia and 8 injured in Labe. International press have reported that at least 25 people were injured in Kindia. We have received no reports of deaths. The majority of the casualties are military officers and members of their families residing on military bases who

have been hit by stray bullets. We have received no reports of soldiers firing upon one another.

14. (C) In addition to firing shots, disgruntled soldiers have looted arms and food stores on several military bases. In Kindia, we received reports that, on the night of May 2, soldiers wearing hoods looted and ransacked the house of General Kerfalla Camara, Chairman of Defense Staff. Another private property belonging to General Kerfalla was previously destroyed by civilian protesters in February during the general strike and associated violence.

Generational Split at the Heart of Military Protest

15. (C) The official impetus for the soldiers' protest is to draw attention to military pay issues. As an appeasement measure during the general strike and state of siege earlier this year, President Lansana Conte promoted the majority of military officers and soldiers, and promised additional benefits. The measures temporarily calmed tensions within the military evidenced by a widening drift between junior and senior-level officers. When the soldiers did not see the promised raises in their salaries at the end of April, they organized in protest and refused to accept their salary envelopes. Via cell-phone, they organized protests on bases throughout the country to bring attention to their plight. No individual or group of officers have identified themselves as leaders of the protest. The present flare-up is another phase of a long-standing conflict over salaries, promotions, and benefits within the military.

16. (C) Over the last two months, an anonymous letter dubbed

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the "red bulletin" has been making its rounds on military bases claiming that soldiers are owed at least 300 billion GNF (approximately 97 million USD), representing nine years of salary arrears. The letter accuses the top military brass of having embezzled the majority of these funds, now making the payments to each soldier impossible. Our contacts within the military confirm that while the soldiers are demanding salary increases, they are more interested in changing the top military guard. One mid-level officer told us that soldiers have closely followed the March appointment of a consensus government and the personnel and policy changes that are currently afoot within all ministries. He said the junior-level officers want to see the same changes within the military that they have witnessed in civilian sectors.

17. (C) At present, this conflict is regarded by both military and civilian leaders as a military-military issue that must be resolved within the channels of the Ministry of Defense. This is the same sentiment being expressed upcountry, although civilian leaders are anxious to bring an end to the standoff, fearing that it could ignite latent tensions from the strikes and related violence earlier this year. Poloff spoke with Emmanuel Felemou, Bishop of Kankan, on May 5 who confirmed shots fired by military officers throughout the previous night. Felemou said the shooting kept most residents awake and in fear and at present, many are staying indoors to avoid any violence. Although stray bullets have landed in several homes, he reports no injuries. The Bishop echoed what other Guineans have expressed, "We hope the reach a conclusion soon -- Guinea cannot afford another wave of violence."

Comment

18. (C) This most recent string of protests is a reflection of the generational divisions that characterize Guinea's military. Junior-level officers and rank-and-file soldiers are demanding more pay and benefits that they argue have been

embezzled and misappropriated by corrupt senior military leaders. While the crisis is currently being contained within military bases and barracks, some Conakry residents fear that civilians might soon join the fray, taking advantage of an opportunity to exact revenge on military officers who have not been punished for their involvement in crimes during the general strike of June 2005 and the January-February 2007 strike and state of siege. On May 5, the National Council of Security and Defense and Guinea's cabinet are holding meeting to chart a way out of the current crises. Our interlocutors have told us to expect the dismissal of many senior military officials. We believe the majority of Guinea's leaders want to avoid at all costs anything that could threaten the new fledging government. On the other hand, there are many entrenched interests who would welcome a crisis to derail the reforms the new government is desperately trying to implement.

MCDONALD